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Mississippi Is the First Gulf State to Receive Restoration Planning Money

(Jackson, Miss.) – The Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) today announced receipt of a \$3.6 million grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The money will be used by MDEQ to coordinate the views, visions, values, and plans of the people of the Gulf Coast as Mississippi puts together an integrated, coastal wide, restoration plan. The project award constitutes approximately one percent of the overall NFWF dollars which will be made available under the consent decree. Mississippi is the only Gulf state to receive dedicated planning money from NFWF to date.

“This money will support Mississippi in developing a comprehensive far reaching road map that ensures that every restoration dollar coming to our state is spent wisely and effectively. We will seize this historic opportunity to coordinate the vision of the people of the Gulf Coast with science-based plans as we identify priority projects that remedy harm, optimize environmental benefits along our coast, and reduce the risk of future harm to natural resources that were affected by the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

“This multi-phase, three year project allows Mississippi to carry out an assessment of current ecological conditions and restoration efforts, compile and evaluate existing resource management plans, determine habitat and living resource focal areas, draft a comprehensive restoration plan to identify priority restoration projects and programs that maximize environmental benefits for Mississippi’s coast, and review and update the planning effort periodically.

“We only have one chance to get this right. This planning money is the best instrument at our disposal for making sure everything we do in this state is coordinated, comprehensive,

and realistic. It is critical that all the pieces work well together. We want to hear from the people of the Coast and today's announcement gives us the opportunity to invite every person in the Gulf to take their seat at the table," said Trudy Fisher, MDEQ Executive Director.

Over the coming year, Mississippi will conduct robust vision mapping, through innovative upstream stakeholder engagement, soliciting the views, and visions, of the people of the Gulf Coast. The planning process will continue through 2017 as relevant planning documents, current restoration efforts, and stakeholder input are merged with science based data to help determine the most effective, and comprehensive plan for restoring our Gulf Coast.

This project represents some of the first obligations of funds received by NFWF's Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund. In early 2013, a U.S. District Court approved two plea agreements resolving certain criminal charges against BP and Transocean related to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Provisions within the plea agreements direct a total of \$2.544 billion to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation over a five-year period. From that amount, NFWF will receive more than \$356 million for projects to protect or restore natural resources in Mississippi in the aftermath of the oil spill.

"NFWF's approval of Mississippi's Restoration Planning Project represents a significant step in the identification and prioritization of projects and programs to restore and conserve Mississippi's coastal habitats and replenish its important living resources," said Jeff Trandahl, Executive Director and CEO of NFWF. "We appreciate the strong leadership the state of Mississippi has shown and support their desire to utilize a portion of the funds available under the Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund for this important effort. Together, we'll work to remedy harm to Gulf Coast natural resources affected by the 2010 Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill."

Mississippi Coastal Restoration Plan Project

To learn more about the state of Mississippi's process for identifying priority Gulf Coast restoration projects, visit www.restore.ms.

To learn more about NFWF's Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund in Mississippi, visit

<http://www.nfwf.org/gulf/Pages/GEBF-Mississippi.aspx>

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